



Sergeant Keith Fricker, paramedic with Lakeport's Upper Lake Fire Protection District, is one of seven California Army Guardsmen on a one-year training assignment with mine detection K-9s.

dogs of war

The Army recently activated “man’s best friend” and seven California Army Guard volunteers for a program to revolutionize mine warfare.

by Major Stan Zezotarski

The Army recently activated “man’s best friend” and seven California Army National Guard engineers for a pioneering program that will revolutionize mine warfare doctrine: Training dogs for mine detection.

“This is the first time that the Army has used dogs to sniff out mines,” said Specialist Douglas Shaw, Company C, 579th Engineer Battalion. “We’re training them to sniff the vapor. Some land mines are encased in plastic, where vapor cannot be detected, so we’re also training them to smell plastic.”

Mine detection dogs will complement, and possibly replace, the mine detector for finding antipersonnel and

tank mines in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

Theoretically, dogs are more reliable, more efficient, and more mobile than most mechanical detection systems.

When breaching mine fields, engineers detonate trip wires by throwing “grappling hooks” attached to ropes over the mine field and then reeling in the hooks. The hook pulls the trip wire and detonates the antipersonnel mines at a safe distance from the soldier.

“We are also training the dogs to detect trip wires,” Shaw said, “allowing us to cut the wires, and create a safe path through the mine field.”

Once training is completed in Texas, they will be taking the dogs to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for continuing training, and some refresher training in the Engineering field. When the dogs and the handlers feel comfortable entering a mine field, they will be shipped to an undisclosed area in the Middle East for two months of live training.

Most of the soldiers come from the law enforcement and safety fields, many with prior experience with dogs. “We are all excited about what we are doing, and proud to be a part of this,” said Staff Sergeant Don McPherson, the noncommissioned officer in charge of this new military unit. “I couldn’t be prouder of my fellow soldiers.” 🐾